Health of Home and School.

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The Menace of Rats.

Plague is the most terrible of the pestilences which have afflicted man. It slays from 60 per cent to 90 per cent of those whom it attacks. In the 14th century it swept away 25,000,000 of the people of Europe. Within the last few years it has destroyed several millions of the people of India. The disease is now widely spread over the world. Just now New Orleans is waging a costly war against plague.

Plague is primarily a disease of rats, and secondarily a disease of man. From infected rats it is transmitted to human beings through the agency of fleas. Therefore, the most important work of guarding against plague, or stamping it out after it appears in a place, is the destruction of rats.

That rats bring plague and some other very serious diseases to mankind is sufficient reason why every community and every household should wage a ceaseless warfare against those rodents which are so dangerous and destructive and so filthy in their habits.

How To Catch Rats.

Dr. W. C. Rucker, Passed Assistant Surgeon of the United States Public Health Service, who was the executive officer of the work which was carried on against plague in San Francisco, a few years ago, gives the following as the methods which were employed by the rat catchers who were in the employ of that service:

It is first to be remembered that the rat is a very wise animal and that the whole operation of trapping him is a test of wits between man and the rat.

Rats are to be found where there is an abundant food-supply for them. Therefore, the best places to catch rats are slaughter houses, meat markets, chicken houses, in and around garbage cans and places where garbage is usually placed. If the rat is deprived of this food-supply he will be attracted by the bait in the trap and thus enter it.

Cage Traps.

The large nineteen-inch French wire cage trap has given very good results where rats are plentiful. It should be made of stiff, heavy wire and well reinforced, as a large, strong rat will force his head between the wires of a weak trap and thus escape. Before setting, the lever on the trap should be tested to see that it works properly. The trap should be placed on a hard surface with the rear end a little higher than the entrance so that the trap will close promptly. When setting the trap in the open it should be fastened to a board on which about an inch of soft dirt has been spread. Place the trap where the rat usually goes for food or in a run-way and disturb the surroundings as little as possible. It is sometimes well to place the trap near where there is dripping water, as the rats come there to drink. If the trap is set in hay or straw or wood, it should be covered (with the exception of the entrance) with this material. When this is not possible it should be covered with a piece of sacking or placed in a dark corner or beneath the floors. When setting the traps in the sewer, a dry place should be chosen.

The rat is more or less of an epicure; therefore, the bait should be changed at frequent intervals. Also, he should be given food which he is

not in the habit of getting, for example: In a meat market, vegetables are the best bait, while in a location where vegetables are plentiful, fresh liver and fish heads or a little grain are best. The following may be suggested as good bait to be used: Fish, fish heads, raw meat, cheese, smoked fish, fresh liver, cooked corn beef, fried bacon, pine nuts, apples, carrots and corn. When trapping in chicken yards a small chick or duckling is remarkably good. When a large number of rats are caught in one trap, search for the female and leave her alive in the trap, as she may call in the young or the males. The bait should be fastened to the inner side of the trap with a piece of fine wire, so that the first rat in cannot force the bait underneath the pan and thus prevent the entrance of other rats. A few grains of barley should be scattered near the entrance of the trap and a small piece of cheese or meat fastened to the pan with a piece of wire. It is often well to touch the pan with a feather which has been dipped in oil of anise or oil of rhodium. Before leaving the trap, it should be smoked with a piece of burning newspaper to kill the smell of the human hands or rats which have been in it. Do not handle the trap after burning it out. When trapping in a neighborhood where rats are known to exist, the traps should not be moved for three or four days unless they have rats in them, as it is well for the rats to become accustomed to seeing them and thus careless about entering. It is not wise to kill rats where they are caught, as the squealing may frighten the other rats away.

Snap Traps.

Snap or spring traps are best for use in houses and stores, with the exception of fish and meat markets. Snap traps are best for use in runways, and on beams and shelves. It is sometimes well to disguise the trap by covering its floor with a little sawdust or dirt. They should be first tested to see that they work properly and that the staples are secure. New traps should be smoked or stained to render them an inconspicuous color.

The bait should consist of some firm material such as fried bacon or tough meat and should be tied on so that the rat will be obliged to pull on it, and thus spring the trap. The trap should be placed in a corner or close to the wall on a flat, hard surface so that the rat cannot spring it with his tail or by walking on it.

Barrel Traps.

In warehouses and granaries large numbers of rats may frequently be trapped by using a barrel or garbage can having a metal top which is carefully balanced. Large pieces of strong cheese are placed in the middle of the cover and a plank laid from the floor to the edge of the barrel. The rat runs up the plank onto the smooth metallic lid, which tips, and the rat is precipitated into the barrel.

In Fig. 1 is shown a snap trap of excellent design. The spring is released either by an upward nibble, or a slight downward pressure. Fig. 2 represents a trap which need not be baited. Set in the run-ways of rats, it is sprung by a very slight touch.

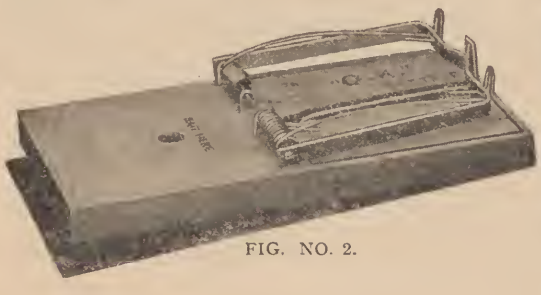

FIG. NO. 2.

FIG. NO. 1.